

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAGR EINV CS

SUBJECT: BISHOP CONDEMNS LARGE LANDHOLDERS IN ARENAL AREA

SUMMARY: A DECLARATION CALLING UPON THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE STEPS TO PREVENT SEVEN LARGE LANDHOLDERS FROM REAPING ALL OF THE IRRIGATION BENEFITS OF THE MASSIVE ARENAL DAM PROJECT HAS RECEIVED WIDESPREAD SUPPORT IN COSTA RICA. THE RESULTING PUBLIC PRESSURE WILL TEND TO FORCE THE GOVERNMENT TO DEVELOP A PROGRAM FOR THE JUST DIVISION OF IRRIGATION BENEFITS FROM THE ARENAL PROJECT AND MAY ALSO GIVE FURTHER IMPETUS TO THE MOVEMENT FOR LAND REFORM IN COSTA RICA. END SUMMARY.

1. THE BISHOP OF TILARAN, MONSIGNOR ROMAN ARRIETA VILLALOBOS, WHO ATTRACTED A GREAT DEAL OF PUBLIC ATTENTION WITH A STRONG STATEMENT RELEASED IN JANUARY CONDEMNING SALE OF TOO MUCH OF COSTA RICA'S LAND TO FOREIGNERS, HAS AGAIN ATTRACTED WIDESPREAD ATTENTION WITH A STATEMENT ON ANOTHER LAND USE ISSUE. HIS LATEST STATEMENT, PUBLISHED IN SAN JOSE NEWSPAPERS OF MARCH 31, CONDEMNS LARGE LANDHOLDERS, SEVEN OF WHOM HE SAYS HAVE BOUGHT UP ALMOST ALL OF THE 100,000 HECTARES OF LAND THAT WILL BE IRRIGATED BY THE ARENAL DAM. WHEREAS THE BISHOP'S EARLIER STATEMENT EXAGGERATED AND DISTORTED THE PROBLEM OF FOREIGN LAND OWNERSHIP, HIS LATEST STATEMENT DESCRIBES A VERY REAL PROBLEM AND BRINGS GREAT

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PRESSURE TO BEAR ON THE GOVERNMENT FOR A JUST COLUTION.

2. THE ESSENCE OF THE PROBLEM, AS STATED BY THE BISHOP, IS THAT IF THE ARENAL PROJECT WILL COSTA AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF MONEY WHICH WILL BE PAID FOR BY THE MILLIONS OF TAX-PAYERS AND ELECTRCITY USERS, WHY SHOULD THE IRRIGATION BENEFITS IT WILL PRODUCE GO ONLY TO A FEW LARGE LAND-HOLDERS. MONSIGNOR ARRIETA CALLS UPON THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE CONCRETE STEPS TO REFORM THE SYSTEM OF LANDHOLDINGS IN THE AREA TO BE IRRIGATED BY ARENAL. HE ESTIMATES THAT 100,000 COSTA RICANS CAN BE SETTLED IN THE AREA AND RECOMMENDS THAT THE LAND BE DIVIDED INTO SMALL HOLDINGS WITH PREFERENCE GIVEN TO THOSE WHO WILL BE DISPLACED BY THE WATER BACKED UP BEHIND THE DAM AND TO OTHER PERSONS CAREFULLY SELECTED FORTHEIR LOVE OF THE LAND AND THEIR FARMING SKILLS. HE RECOMMENDS THAT THE PRESENT LANDOWNERS BE COMPENSATED BUT ONLY FOR THE CURRENT VALUE OF THE LAND AND NOT FOR THE VALUE THAT THE LAND WILL HAVE ONCE IT IS IRRIGATED.

3. MONSIGNOR ARRIETA'S APPEAL HAS ATTRACTED ALMOST UNANIMOUS SUPPORT FROM THE PRESS AND FROM POLITICAL LEADERS WHO HAVE SPOKEN OUT THUS FAR. EXCELSIOR SAID THAT ENERGETIC ACTION OF THE STATE IS NEEDED TO ASSURE THAT NEW AGRICULTURAL ZONES ARE DEVELOPED UNDER THE SAME CONDITIONS AS THE CENTRAL VALLEY OF THE COUNTRY WAS DEVELOPED, THAT IS, WITH THE LAND DVIDED AMONG SMALL PROPRIETORS. LA REPUBLICA SAID THAT IF THE POLITICIANS DO NOT ACT RAPIDLY, SERIOUSLY, AND WITH RESPONSIBILITY IN SUCH AN IMPORTANT MATTER NOT EVEN ALL THE VOICES OF THE CHURCH WILL BE SUFFICIENT TO HOLD BACK THE CHAOS THAT COULD COME FROM AGRARIAN PROBLEM OF COSTA RICA.

4. VICE PRESIDENT CASTILLO CALLED THE BISHOP'S CONCERN "FULLY JUSTIFIED" AND SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS IN THE PROCESS OF REMEDYING THE SITUATION. AGRICULTURE MINISTER GARRON SAID THAT THE LAND TO BE IRRIGATED BY THE ARENAL PROJECT SHOULD BE TAKEN OVER BY THE GOVERNMENT AND RENTED OR OTHERWISE MADE AVAILABLE TO BENEFIT THE GREATESTNUMBER OF COSTA RICANS. GARRON SAID THE BISHOP'S DECLARATION

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"CONTAINS THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH IN RELATION TO THIS SITUATION."(A GROUP OF SIX PLN DEPUTIES SAID THAT THE ARENAL LAND SHOULD DIVIDED AMONG SMALL PEASANTS. THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURE COUNCIL, REGELIO COTO, CALLED THE BISHOP'S DECLARATION PROPER, OPPORTUNE AND PATROTIC. HE CALLED FOR CREATION OF COOPERATIVES AND FOR THE IMPOSITION OF REASONABLE LIMITS ON PRODUCTIVE LARGE HOLDINGS AND THE PROHIBITION OF UNPRODUCTIVE OR

UNDER-UTILIZED LARGE HOLDINGS. DEMOCRATIC PARTY DEPUTY ARNOLDO CAMPOS BRIZUELA SAID HE WAS MOVED BY THE BISHOP'S STATEMENT AND SAID HIE BENEFITS OF IRRIGATION SHOULD BENEFIT THE GREATEST NUMBER OF COSTA RICANS. PASO (COMMUNIST) DEPUTY EDUARDO MORA SAID THAT HALF OF THE CULTIVABLE LAND IN THE COUNTRY IS IN THE HANDS OF THE LARGE LAHDHOLDERS AND THAT NONE OF THE RECENT GOVERNMENTS OF COSTA RICA HAVE UNDERSTOOD THE FULL DEPTH OF THE AGRI-CULTURAL CRISIS IN THE COUNTRY OR WHAT REMEDIES ARE NEEDED TO CURE IT.

5. PERHAPS DOMINGO GARCIA VILLALOBOS, A DIRECTOR OF ITCO, CAME CLOSEST TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER WHEN HE SAID, "IT WAS NECESSARY THAT A MAN OF THE POSITION AND MORAL STATURE OF MONSIGNOR ARRIETA MAKE PUBLICLY THE DECLARATION THAT IN NO WAY SHOULD THE ARENAL IRRIGATION PLAN FAVOR ANY LARGE LANDHOLDER." CLEARLY THE THRUST OF COMMENTS ON THE BISHOP'S STATEMENT SUGGEST A WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT WITHOUT SUCH PUBLIC PRESSURE THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT WELL HAVE FAILED TO TAKE THE NECESSARY ACTION TO PROVIDE FOR A JUST DIVISION OF THE IRRIGATION BENEFITS FROM ARENAL. VICE PRESIDENT CASTILLO IS NOW ESTIMATING THAT THE NECESSARY STEPS WILL BE TAKEN IN APRIL OR MAY WHEN A REPORT IS RECEIVED FROM A COMMISSION ESTABLISHED TO STUDY THE PROBLEM OF THE LANDS IRRIGATED BY ARENAL.

6. PRESIDENT ODUBER'S POSITION ON THIS ISSUE IS NOT KNOWN. ON THE ONE HAND, HE EXPRESSED PRIVATELY THAT AMBASSADOR TODMAN HAS OPPOSITION TO THE CONCEPT OR NEED OF FAR-REACHING LAND REFORM WHEN THE AMBASSADOR PRESENTED HIS CREDENTIALS. ON THE OTHER HAND, IN A MEETING APRIL 1, SUBSEQUENT TO MONSIGNOR ARRIETA'S STATEMENT, PRES ODUBER TOLD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE WAS GLAD THAT THE CHURCH IS BEHIND THE PLN ON THIS ISSUE. PROBABLY PRESIDENT ODUBER WILL SUPPORT USING THE ARENAL IRRIGATED LANDS EITHER FOR SMALL HOLDINGS OR FOR DEVELOPMENT BY COOPERATIVES, EVEN IF HE DOES NOT TAKE A STRONG POSITON AGAINST LARGE LANDHOLDINGS IN THE REST OF THE COUNTRY.

TODMAN

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